



Food Safety & Nutrition

Mailing Food Gifts to Military Friends and Family



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Many members of the American Armed Forces will not be home for the holidays this year. The next best thing may be receiving greetings and gifts of food items from their families and friends.

When thinking about what to send to your friends and loved ones consider food gifts that are not perishable, can tolerate a range of temperatures for several days, and can withstand a bumpy ride. If you are not sure how well a food will ship, test it. Wrap the product well and place the food in a container and shake it a few times. If it holds its shape, it should mail well.

Perishable foods such as meats, smoked fish, and soft cheeses must be kept at 40 °F or below to remain safe to eat. These foods cannot be safely left at room temperature for more than 2 hours, much less for a week or more in the mail. Foodborne bacteria that may be present on these foods grow fastest at temperatures above 40 °F and can double every 20 minutes. When this happens, someone eating the food can get sick.

As an alternative to homemade gifts, some families may wish to send mail order foods. Shelf-stable “summer sausage,” cheeses, cakes, and snacks can be ordered on the Internet or through mail order catalogs. These services have food items that are safe to send through the mail and can package them so they arrive in good condition. Because of the delivery time and distances between the U.S. and duty stations overseas, do not order any food gifts that must be kept refrigerated.

Recommended Food Gifts:

- Dried beef or poultry such as beef jerky, turkey jerky, or beef sticks. Dried foods that have moisture removed will last longer and will make the trip overseas.
- Dehydrated soups and fruit drink mixes are lightweight and easy to pack.
- Regional condiments such as hot sauce and Cajun seasonings in packets are useful for spicing up Meals Ready to Eat (MREs).
- Canned specialties such as pâté, corned beef, shelf-stable hams, anchovies, shrimp, dips, and cracker spreads make nice treats. Even just cans of tuna, chicken or crab can be enjoyed with crackers. Recipients should be cautioned not to use any cans that are damaged or swollen
- Dense and dry baked goods such as fruitcakes and biscotti. Pound cakes and dense carrot or spice cakes can be sent, but consider freezing them and then sending them as a perishable product. Depending on the length of time for delivery, they may mold.
- Bar cookies mail well. Include those with coconut, dried fruits, dates or fig fillings.

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- Sturdy cookies such as peanut butter, ginger snaps and sugar cookies. See recipe below for a great cookie that travels well.
 - Commercially-packaged cakes and cookies in airtight tins, dry cookies, and specialty crackers.
 - Dried fruits such as raisins and apricots, canned nuts and fruit, and commercially-packaged trail mix need no refrigeration.
 - Hard candies and firm homemade sweets such as fudge, pralines, peanut brittle, caramels and toffee are safe to mail because their high sugar content prevents bacterial growth.

Food Gifts Not Recommended for mailing:

- Foods those are high in moisture like quick breads (pumpkin or banana breads), moist brownies or soft cookies.
- Fragile cookies or tarts. Any kind of food product that is fragile will probably not make the trip in one piece.
- Foods in glass containers should not be mailed because the container can break.
- Liquids that may leak during shipping.

Packaging

- Good shipping containers include: rigid plastic freezer or refrigerator containers, or metal canisters.
- Two, 1-gallon plastic milk jugs can be cut to hold food. Cut the top half off each jug. Wash and air dry. Place the wrapped food inside one half; fill empty spaces with crumpled tissue, unsalted air-popped popcorn. Fit the second jug half over the first like a lid and seal with freezer tape. Place in box to mail.
- Wrap food in aluminum foil or plastic before placing in shipping containers. This will prevent the products from drying out during shipping.
- When mailing firm cookies and homemade candies, wrap each piece individually in to preserve their shape.
- If you are going to ship food in its baking container, cool and remove the product from the pan. After cooled, wrap in plastic wrap or foil and then return it to the clean pan.
- Once the food is pre-packaged well, then select a strong cardboard box to mail the food in.
- Place a cushion of crumpled newspaper (a way to send local news to family as well as being a cushion for the food), commercially popped popcorn or foam packing “peanuts”.
- Seal securely with packaging tape.
- If there are perishable foods in the box, label it perishable so it will be sent and delivered in the quickest method possible.

Mailing Regulations

The U.S. Post Office says “Mail early” if you want the package to arrive by Christmas. Check with the U.S. Post Office for mailing dates. The postal clerk will ask customers what is in the package. The purpose of that is to be sure it is sent in a safe manner. For example if the package contains products that cannot be safely sent in an airplane then they need to know that. If they are perishable products they want to get it there as quickly as possible. So the reason for asking the questions is to help get the product there safely and using appropriate methods of transportation.

This recipe was given to me by a WSU Food Advisor, Muggs Broselle. She says they travel very well and stay fresh during their travels.

Monstor Cookies

Make 90 cookies

Preparation Time 20 minutes

12 large eggs	4 cups sugar
2 pounds brown sugar	1 Tablespoon vanilla
1 Tablespoon maple syrup	8 teaspoons baking soda
1 pound butter	3 pound peanut butter
18 cups oatmeal	1 pound chocolate chips
1 pound M&Ms Plain Chocolate candy	

- Mix eggs, sugars, butter and peanut butter together.
 - Add vanilla and soda.
 - Add ½ of the oatmeal then the chocolate chips.
 - Add the rest of the oatmeal. You may need to add more oatmeal until the dough is no longer sticky.
 - Add the M&Ms now and mix well or add them to the top of each cookie before baking
 - Use an ice cream scoop to put on cookie sheet
 - Bake at 350 F for 12 minutes.
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